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ABSTRACT

Community college faculty and administrators from seven states joined in a dialogue on liberal education in the community college in order to identify problems, define terms, and to suggest solutions to further the development of liberal education in the community college. The discussion focused on four issues: education for practical wisdom (education and training); meaning and distortion of relevancy, immediacy, applicability and meaningfulness; reconciling past, present, and future; and integration of liberal education with general education. The definition of liberal education arose as a fifth issue. Based on this discussion, participants developed a mission statement, a rationale, a curriculum and a staff development plan for liberal education in the community college for transfer, career, and continuing education students. Finally, operational definitions were developed for five key terms: liberal education, general education, liberal arts, training, and education. Along with synopses of the discussion, solutions, and definitions, speeches by James Gollattscheck and Eric Wormold are summarized in the document. (RT)

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POET ON THE MOON:

A DIALOGUE ON LIBERAL EDUCATION IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

held at

Valencia Community College

Orlando, Florida

15-16 November 1976

Association of American Colleges
Washington, D. C.
1977

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FOREWORD

In pursuance of the reoriented mission of the Association of American Colleges -- the National Association for Liberal Learning -- as mandated by its members at the annual meeting of 1976, the Association initiated in the fall of that year a series of invitational dialogues on various aspects of liberal education.

Five such dialogues were conducted in October - December 1976, with the help of host institutions in different parts of the country. Additional dialogues, addressed to the distinctive concerns of the several kinds of institutions of higher learning that make up the Association's present and potential membership, are planned for the near future.

This pamphlet summarizes the proceedings of one such dialogue, held on November 15 and 16 on the West Campus of Valencia Community College, Orlando, Florida. The dialogue, on Liberal Learning in the Community College, was designed for the benefit of an important sector of the American academic community which had not previously formed part of AAC's sphere of service. The participants were some thirty men and women -- both teachers and administrators -- representing thirteen community colleges, two universities and the State of Florida Department of Education. Six of the community colleges are members of the Florida system of community colleges; the other seven are located in Missouri, New York, Ohio, Texas, Vermont and Virginia (2).

The Association of American Colleges is deeply indebted to President Gollattscheck and his colleagues of Valencia Community College for their warm hospitality and their skilful organization of the dialogue. Special thanks are due to Mr. Donald J. Tighe, chairman of the Communications Department at Valencia, for his lucid and lively reporting. We hope and believe that his report will prove illuminating to other colleges as they grapple with the problems of liberal education and will encourage them to repeat, or rather extend, the dialogue so auspiciously begun. If so, it will make an invaluable contribution to AAC's mission of promoting and enhancing humane and liberating learning.

Frederic W. Ness
President
Association of American Colleges

POET ON THE MOON:

LIBERAL EDUCATION IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

When Neil Armstrong climbed down from the lunar module and in full view of the world put his left foot on the moon, we witnessed a triumph of technology. Who could question at that moment -- or now, for that matter -- the value of technology to modern man? Proof that money, time, material, training and technical know-how pay off flickered on the tube. Even philosophers were impressed by the wonder they beheld: a bubble-headed, puffed-up man of technology kicking dust that only loony poets had raved about for centuries.

But in technology's most glorious moment to date, man's response was humane -- and poetic. For in what has become a new adage (if there can be such a thing), Armstrong made clear that technology is merely a way to something bigger: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." In short, when NASA lofted a human being into space, it put a poet on the moon. It wedded technology and art and symbolized the best man has to offer: matter and mind, body and soul linked in exploration.

The first moon landing, then, makes clear that technologist and poet are inseparable kin. It dramatizes the need for liberal education in an increasingly technological society, for liberal education is the bridge that spans these two sides of man's nature. This poet on the moon is an appropriate symbol for the AAC/Valencia Community College dialogue on liberal learning: Liberal Education in the Community College.

Armstrong spoke of "man" and "mankind"; he did not specify Americans or citizens of the free world. His monologue was inclusive. And thus it becomes an appropriate theme for the VCC/AAC dialogue, for community colleges are above all inclusive. They are, for the most part, open door; they serve

virtually all the people, not merely an academic elite. They appeal to the traditional and the non-traditional learner; the university-bound and the two-year community-bound; the young, the middle-aged, the elderly; the handicapped, the minority member, the prison-bound, the home-bound. They offer credit and non-credit courses and programs. They are both transfer-oriented and job-oriented.

Whatever they do, they do it for the whole person -- for the practical and the theoretical, for the hands-on and minds-on, for the technologist and the poet. They do not take students through the open door, turn on the "technologist" or "poet" switch and thus turn out, as Emerson says, persons amputated from the trunk of society.

BEGINNINGS

James F. Gollattscheck, president of Valencia Community College, opened the dialogue. He said that more and more Americans are receiving all or part of their education in community colleges. As community colleges accept the traditional educational burden, and the additional responsibility for inspiring people to seek lifelong learning, they must ask themselves, and search for answers to, some tough questions. What education will we offer? Should it be predominantly or strictly job-oriented? Will it improve the quality of life in our communities? Will it have an impact on the economy? How much liberal education should we offer? Are the liberal education needs of career students different from those engaged in lifelong learning? Is it the responsibility of the community college to preserve liberal education? How can our traditional concepts of liberal education, long nourished by the more exclusive liberal arts colleges, be made relevant, even acceptable, to new students in new institutions? Are there programs which can serve as models?

Gollattscheck reminded the group that community colleges are extremely democratic, that they reflect the attitudes and moods of their communities, not merely a privileged segment of those communities. Often, in fact, the community actually helps develop curricula. Will these communities, he asked, faced with the problems brought on by increased technology, shrinking finances and dwindling natural resources, see the values inherent in liberal education?

The answer? If proper leadership is provided. Because they are closer to the American people than higher education has ever been, Gollattscheck said, community colleges can be an effective force in providing liberal education for a wider range of students than ever before.

THE MISSION

The mission of the dialogue was to identify problems, to define terms, and finally to suggest solutions and perhaps programs to further the development of liberal education in the community college. The dialogue, which will be described below, offers no final solution. One group report put it nicely: "After all, we've been wrestling with this for two or three thousand years."

To spark the dialogue, the facilitator, James R. Richburg, Valencia West dean of academic affairs, posed four issues as points of departure: (1) Education for Practical Wisdom: Education and Training, (2) Meaning and Distortion of Relevancy, Immediacy, Applicability and Meaningfulness, (3) Reconciling Past, Present and Future, and (4) Integration of "Liberal Education" with "General Education": Liberal Education for Whom? A brief general discussion produced a fifth issue: (5) What is Liberal Education?

Having established the issues, the assembly broke into five groups,

each to explore one of the issues. After an hour's discussion, the groups' conclusions were examined by a jury of three. Each group revised their findings and submitted reports that became the basis for the dialogue of the second day. The following summaries represent the results of the group discussions.

Education for Practical Wisdom: Education and Training

"Practical wisdom" concisely labels the product of liberal learning; it succinctly states the ultimate goal of the community college experience. It conveys the ideal union of the inner and outer person: wise judgments forcefully implemented. It means vital activity as opposed to ivory-tower intellectualizing.

Although there is a distinction between education and training, between content and process, between ideas and skills, a successful liberal education includes each of these elements. All community college programs -- transfer, career, and continuing education -- should, within the limits of time, curricula, and student wishes and needs, shape both the inner and the outer person.

Meaning and Distortion of Relevancy, Immediacy, Applicability and Meaningfulness

The value of an education can be determined by asking this question: What is it good for? The public asks two blunt questions: Does it develop marketable skills? Does it offer long-range as well as short-range benefits? Most students ask an equally practical question: Does it offer marketable skills? But they are not so narrow, for they also ask: Will it change me?

Faculty views are perhaps broader, but even they ask a hard, practical

question: What can a person with a liberal education do? And they try to supply some answers: The liberally educated student should be able to (1) make logical decisions, (2) comprehend information, (3) recognize expertise and fraudulence in all fields, (4) understand how body and mind function, (5) understand and respect the physical world, (6) develop social skills, and (7) cope with change.

Reconciling the Past, the Present and the Future

The past, the present and the future of liberal education were not reconciled in this discussion, but the dialogue produced some stinging observations on the past, some mildly promising comments on the present, and some provocative questions about the future. In the past, liberal education was elitist, available to those who could afford it -- to the financially privileged and to those, moneyed or not, who were discovered to be gifted. It was, in fact, preparation for leadership, liberating for the favored few, decidedly future-oriented, and clearly undemocratic.

Latterly the trend has changed, for liberal education has become more egalitarian and more specialized. Because changing educational patterns and economic conditions have glutted the job market with liberally educated graduates (and many not-so-liberally educated graduates) with too little practical training, the role of liberal education seems clouded.

What does the future hold? It poses three basic questions: (1) Have the aims of liberal education ever been realized? (2) Have the aims of liberal education changed? (3) Can liberal education survive if it continues to be identified with subject matter and to stay at odds with technical training?

Integration of "Liberal Education" with "General Education": Liberal Education for Whom?

Where did the terms "liberal education" and "general education" come from? Liberal education flowed traditionally from the liberal arts, a group of studies made up of academic disciplines -- language, history, philosophy, abstract science. Emphasis was put on cultural concerns as opposed to practical training for a profession.

General education and continuing education came into vogue when community colleges and other kinds of institutions that were not traditional liberal arts colleges needed terms to describe what they were doing. Both terms described what had happened and what was happening in some segments of higher education. The terms were frequently used as trade-offs; they became acceptable labels to describe the new "practical" emphasis in palatable language.

However the terms came into being, what is important is the outcome of this new education, for general education is for everyone. It is, in a sense, education for survival. What, students asked, will general education do for us? For one thing, a general education should help students discover how to learn and should motivate them to continue to learn. It must help students develop different ways of perceiving, not restrict them to the parochial views of a narrow career orientation. A general education should introduce students to methods of inquiry and analysis. It should cause content-learning to lead into process-learning and thus prepare students to live a full life, to be useful, to be "able." It should, in short, provide students with transferable abilities.

The group stressed the need for a clear distinction between knowing and understanding. It also made clear that general education implies a

great need for teacher training -- and retraining -- for too many teachers still emphasize content unrelated to process.

What Is Liberal Education?

Liberal education can be any learning at any level in any discipline as long as it helps a person (1) establish a value system, (2) think clearly, critically and creatively, (3) communicate ideas in varying ways to others, (4) learn about self, others and environment and how the three relate, (5) become a more integrated person, (6) develop a positive attitude toward lifelong learning.

Perhaps there is a more important question: Why should people have a liberal education? The discussion produced four reasons. First, a liberal education helps a person make use of human resources. Second, a liberal education helps a person develop and maintain sound mental, physical and emotional health. Third, a liberal education helps a person make satisfying use of leisure time. Fourth, a liberal education helps a person prepare for the changes promised by the future -- technological, sociological and physiological.

COMMENTS BY ERIC WORMALD

Following the afternoon sessions, the group had dinner together. After dinner, Eric Wormald, vice president of the Association of American Colleges, offered some informal comments on the theme of the dialogue. To some extent, he summed up what the groups had discovered during the afternoon, but basically he laid a foundation for the second day's discussion.

The world, Wormald said, has always been unsatisfactory for most of the people who live in it; it is still unsatisfactory. We are up against grave shortages and inequities; growing concentrations of irresponsible

economic power; governments suspected by the governed to be enemies, not instruments of the people; the risk of nuclear catastrophe. Though coping with such problems is a tough assignment, people in education must believe that humanity can do something about its situation.

Science and technology will help us solve some of our problems, but the most intractable are problems of human nature, relationships, motivations. Science and technology are morally neutral and potentially mischievous. Everything depends on what use is made of their products by the people who use them. People, as we know, are imperfect, fallible -- in the language of theologians, sinful -- both animals and gods. These two elements of our nature are always in tension, often in conflict. We must constantly strike a balance.

Education, especially higher education, has the responsibility and the capacity for coping with the problems created by these two warring elements of our nature. Through research, reflection and, above all, teaching, higher education can help us develop the means of being happier and better people, constructive citizens capable of living in a civilized and humane community.

But higher education has lately come under severe criticism. Discrepancies between our pretensions and our achievements have given rise to widespread skepticism. Critics ask whether we have overestimated the human capacity for learning and growth. Nevertheless, if higher education can't help mankind solve these problems, what other human institutions can?

The role of higher education is inextricably mixed up with values. Objectivity must not become an idol. Although we must be intellectually honest, must look facts in the face, objectivity must not become a disguise for insensitivity and social irresponsibility. Values are at the root of human activity. I'm inclined to think, Wormald said, that the most essential

purpose of higher education is to help us make good choices.

The academy has from its origins been subject to ambivalence and internal conflict. It began as a device for the mutual support and defense of scholars in the practice of scholarship. But, very soon, able and ambitious young men perceived other benefits in higher education than the "disinterested pursuit of learning." This other perspective has been a source of continuing ambiguity in the academy but of great benefit to society. There is nothing unworthy or disreputable about preparing men and women to make their way in the world, provided they remember that the nurturing of marketable skills is not the sole aim of higher education.

What, then, should a liberal education do? Wormald spoke of a friend who, recalling what her education at a liberal arts college did for her, identified six prime benefits of a liberal education. It developed in her (1) a high standard of personal achievement, (2) an active intellectual curiosity, (3) a questioning, skeptical attitude, (4) an egalitarian spirit, (5) a strong sense of obligation to do something for the common welfare, and (6) an abiding sense of fellowship.

These qualities are to be sought in the graduates of every institution of higher education. All institutions of higher learning should equip their graduates not only with usable and flexible skills but also with qualities that make them fit to be good citizens in a decent human society. In higher education there should be no sheep and goats, no first-class and second-class citizens. Whatever else they do, educational institutions must be engaged in humane and liberating learning.

MISSION STATEMENT, RATIONALE, CURRICULUM, STAFF

Building on the previous day's base and the evening's comments, the

dialogue began next morning to move in the direction of solutions. To do that, the large group broke into three parts, each to work out a mission statement, a rationale, a curriculum and a staff development plan for liberal education in the community college. The plan was to include three types of students: transfer, career, and continuing education.

Transfer Students

The mission of liberal education for community college transfer students is to make them aware of the realities in a changing world and to cultivate their abilities to communicate this awareness. Transfer students must develop the ability to analyze critically and to be flexible enough to adapt to change. Above all, they must develop a sense of responsibility to society.

The first two years of a four-year program are especially important in developing positive attitudes toward the values implicit in a general education.

The curriculum and staff necessary for liberal education must be developed simultaneously. Course content must provide a solid underpinning. But the courses themselves must transcend content and emphasize values. Instructors must be concerned with developing positive attitudes toward learning and intellectual growth; there must, in fact, be integration of facts and values in an atmosphere conducive to human growth and understanding. Liberal education develops a sense of inquiry and creativity. It should ideally include a background in the performing and visual arts. Perhaps more important than anything else, a liberal education prepares students for lifelong learning.

Career Students

The mission of liberal education for students in career education

programs is to develop in potential specialists a sense of perspective on human experience that goes beyond the narrow limits of a profession.

The rationale for liberal education in career programs is to provide students with a context for informed choices in terms of both immediate career goals and life goals in an increasingly complex society.

The community college must develop a curriculum that provides a total learning environment which allows students to gain skills they need to deal with their experiences in healthful and self-enhancing ways. This curriculum should include, for credit, a continuing support seminar at the college for the integration, evaluation and continuing production of individual learning plans.

To develop the staff necessary for the liberalizing of the career students' programs, the community college must provide for the faculty the same learning environment and enhancing opportunities as those desired for the students.

Continuing Education Students

Respecting and responding to adults in the community, the community college must make liberal education available to a broad spectrum of people. The purpose of the continuing education program is to enable people to meet their own career and personal needs as individuals and as members of society. It should provide broad, rich and varied educational experiences that are readily accessible to the entire community and that meet the occupational, career-oriented, professional, technical and personal needs and interests of individual students.

Changing technology, changing human and natural resources, changing careers, changing life styles, changing personal roles -- all these have

created a vital need for continuing education and lifelong learning to equip individuals with the skills and abilities to meet these changes and a corresponding need for society as a whole to be supplied with persons able either as individuals or as groups to promote and manage the changes. Continuing education and lifelong learning will promote upward mobility for more people.

The curriculum for the continuing education student should be developed, organized and adapted on the basis of what the community needs or requests or demands, the college acting as consultant. The curriculum should include survey courses organized around a common core. They should be interdisciplinary courses that stress problem solving. Above all, the approach should be pragmatic.

As the teaching staff is selected, it should be oriented to the college community and should be convinced of the necessity to keep in touch with community needs. It should be regularly evaluated to ensure that community orientation is maintained. The part-time staff should keep in close touch with the full-time staff. There must be a continuing in-service training program to keep all staff members aware of new developments in community college teaching and of changes in community demands.

SOME FINAL DEFINITIONS

Part of the early dialogue assignment was to identify and provide operational definitions for five key terms: (1) liberal education, (2) general education, (3) liberal arts, (4) training, and (5) education.

Liberal Education

The group defined liberal education by saying, not what they thought it was, but what they thought its recipients should be able to do, for

liberal education transcends disciplines and content. Thus, liberally educated persons perceive and carry out their parts in a developing culture, analyze and solve problems, question, exercise the practical wisdom necessary to identify and reach personal and social goals, know when to stand firm and when to bend, see the world in human rather than material terms, value humar potential, recognize the part scholarship plays in promoting freedom of choice, and seek lifelong learning experiences.

General Education

At the operational level, general education can range from the broadest perspective -- what all individuals need to know, to understand and to be able to do in order to function humanly -- to the narrowest perspective -- what credits or courses students need to complete in order to satisfy specified educational-institutional requirements for graduation or certification.

At the abstract level, general education applies to all, both in and outside the institution. It is not special; that is, it is not designed for specific groups of people or specific activities. Its aim is to enable students to integrate experiences, facts, skills, attitudes, to integrate cognitive, affective and psychomotor functions.

The general education program has goals that range from the acquisition of survival or coping skills to the realization of one's potential as a creative, reflective, inquisitive, self-sufficient individual. These goals are not universal in educational institutions. Rather, they depend on (1) the kinds of students the institution serves, (2) the society and culture the institution serves, and (3) the resources of the institution's clientele.

Thus, the institution must assign priorities and make decisions about the goals of its general education program. By all means it must continually re-examine and reassess those goals.

A close look makes clear what general education is not. It is not an introduction to disciplines as the first step in specialization. It is not content for its own sake. It is not the development of skills or the acquisition of knowledge precisely for their applicability to a job, a career or another specialization. It is not a collection of courses. It is not simply a rearrangement of content, like an interdisciplinary program or course for the sake of being interdisciplinary. It is not so abstract and future-oriented that it can only be hoped for, wished for, or assumed to happen somewhere, sometime. It is not merely being able to read, to write and to do arithmetic.

Liberal Arts

Liberal arts includes that area of knowledge or content generally related to the arts and humanities. The liberal arts content is often included in specialized programs of study that increase students' awareness, their ability to communicate, their understanding of reality, their sense of perspective and their appreciation of life. This content can become as specialized as that in the sciences and professions.

Training and Education

Training and education are alike in that both suggest discipline that leads to orderly performance or thought. They differ in dominance and goals. Training suggests pointing to, doing; education suggests drawing out, thinking. Training precedes competence in carrying out tasks; education means knowing, developing the ability to comprehend and to evaluate.

Training and education rightly combined result in students' attaining excellence as both carpenters and philosophers, as both professionals and citizens. In the process, they acquire a sense of responsibility for the development of the intellect, the job and the community.

CONCLUSION

More than a hundred years before Armstrong walked on the moon, thinking people were concerned about the dangers of over-specialization, about turning human beings into objects by putting too much emphasis on their marketable skills. They too were concerned about the unpracticality of an ivory-tower education. Thoreau put it succinctly in Walden, the American bible of "practical wisdom":

> To my astonishment I was informed on leaving college that I had studied navigation!--why, if I had taken one turn down the harbor I should have known more about it.

Certainly the romantics, like the new Association of American Colleges, viewed with "grave apprehension the growing dichotomy between liberal and humanistic education and vocational or practical education." They were aware of the sharp separation developing between the poet and the plumber, between persons of soul and persons of skill. They were aware of the necessity to "combine a humane and liberating influence with the inculcation of broadly usable skills."

Unfortunately the romantics had no educational institution to make available to all who wanted it humane and liberating learning. Unfortunately institutions of higher education were selective, available mainly to those who had the money and leisure to afford them. Americans of the 1970s, fortunately, have the community college, an open-door institution of higher

learning that can indeed enlighten and link the technician and the poet in each of us.

By offering a liberal education to transfer, career, and continuing education students, the community college promises lifelong learning experiences to everyone eager to join in mankind's giant leap from the moon into the tantalizing mystery lying even farther beyond, where the poet and the technician in all of us will fuse to turn Armstrong's "apollonian" monologue into all mankind's dialogue.

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